



IDAHO DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & WELFARE

DIRK KEMPTHORNE – Governor
KARL B. KURTZ – Director

OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR
450 West State Street, 10th Floor
P.O. Box 83720
Boise, ID 83720-0036
PHONE 208-334-5625
FAX 208-334-5926

NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
July 15, 2005

Ross Mason
(208) 334-0693

FREMONT COUNTY BENEFITS FROM \$11.8 MILLION DOLLAR INVESTMENT FROM THE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & WELFARE

Last year, Fremont County residents and businesses received \$11.8 million from Department of Health & Welfare programs that help people in need. The investment benefits every one of the county's 12,100 residents. Of Idaho's 44 counties, Fremont County ranks number 15 in per capita investment of Health & Welfare dollars.

The disbursement of state and federal tax dollars amounts to \$972 for every man, woman and child residing in Fremont County. This includes citizens who may not receive a single direct service from the Department. The statewide average is \$839 per capita.

The Department invested \$1.15 billion in Idaho communities in 2004. These funds came from Medicaid, additional payments to hospitals, Food Stamps, the Idaho Child Care Program, the Women, Infants and Children nutritional program, foster care and a variety of other assistance programs.

"This is an investment for all Fremont County residents," says Health & Welfare Director Karl Kurtz. "These are tax dollars put to good use because they are used to help people become healthy and productive. This money goes to foster care for children in crisis, substance abuse treatment, child care so parents can work to support their family, and dozens of other badly needed services."

“This is as much about sustaining communities as it is investing,” adds Kurtz. “By providing programs that support people, we are helping communities and their residents build the endurance and strength they need to remain vital. Everyone profits from this investment, not just those who use Department programs. This isn’t just me pounding my chest. That’s what community leaders tell us.”

Fremont County Commission Chairman Donald Trupp says, “(Department programs) are critical, especially Medicaid because we have a lot of retired people here. We have mostly service jobs here, but the most of the money that comes into the county stays in the county. A lot of people who could not get help otherwise are getting it through Medicaid. Without it, the county would be paying a lot more in medical bills.”

Last year, the Department’s Medicaid Division spent \$10.6 million on health care for residents of the county — \$2.4 million more than in 2003. A large share of the dollars go to drug stores like Falls Drug and Hardware in St. Anthony. “It certainly is an investment in the community. It would be a 20 percent cut in my business without it. It pays salaries. We are the mainstay of our clients and everybody depends on us. We appreciate our Medicaid clients. They are not just customers, but friends. We want to be around to help, but we need to have Medicaid to do that.”

Fremont County residents also received \$511,000 in Food Stamps to help feed their families — \$65,000 more than in 2003. The number of people using Food Stamps increased to 572 in 2004 — 100 more than the previous year. Dave’s Jubilee Market in Ashton redeemed \$32,500 of the total Food Stamp dollars.

Owner Dave Jacobson says Food Stamp dollars are “very important. Besides being of benefit to the people who use them, it’s a benefit to our store to rely on those Food Stamp dollars. Last week alone, it averaged about \$175 per day.” On an annual basis, redemptions account for between two and five per cent of his store’s income.

Jacobson employs 24 full- and part-time people. “It sustains our workforce in the winter. Winters here are slow. And for this year, any industry related to snow has had a tough winter. We are an hour away from Targhee, and we get snow machine traffic to Yellowstone Park and Island Park.”

If he didn’t have Food Stamp income, he says, “It would be a big loss. We probably would have a couple of less (employees).”

Department spending help people, and it has an upside for business, according to Idaho economist John Church. “This is not lost money. The spending is an investment. It goes back into the economy. If an employer came to town and spent this much money we would be elated. People need to remember that a big chunk of this is federal money which is a huge return on our taxes. This comes back and helps stimulate the economy and it helps people.”

Kurtz says, “Not only is the Department money a human investment, but it creates jobs and maintains healthy businesses. These dollars recycle numerous times in each community and help us keep the high quality of life we enjoy in Idaho. This is a wise use of taxpayer dollars because the money spent in the community often stays in the community. The dollars are spent again and again to help create jobs and an infrastructure that provides healthy and safe neighborhoods.”

###

(**Editors:** Interviews are available on request. Contact Ross Mason at 334-0693 or Regional Director Tracey Sessions at 528-5791 for more information.)

**More information on Health & Welfare’s
investment in every Idaho County
can be found online at
<http://www.healthandwelfare.idaho.gov>**